

Uganda eyes solar energy

By Vision Reporter

In Uganda's bid to diversify her electricity generation mix from hydro segment, the country is exploring alternative sources of renewable energy, like solar and thermal energy.

Only recently, Uganda launched Sooty Solar Plant, the largest of its kind in East Africa.

Barely a year after the achievement, a new solar plant in Tororo district that had been under construction since December last year, has been completed and is awaiting commissioning by the contractor.

According to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, Uganda's total installed generation capacity stood at 924.9MW at the end of 2016. Of this, 759.4MW was licensed across all energy sources. Large hydros account for 69% of installed capacity, while thermal, co-generation and small hydro account for 15%, 9% and 7%, respectively.

The project was contracted to Tororo Solar North Limited, which appointed Building Energy, a South African firm, as the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contractor.

"It is undergoing technical performance tests by UETCL and Umeme and it is expected to be switched to the national grid early next month," Jaco Brits, the project site manager, said.

He explained that the 10MW project consists of about 32,240 solar panels. Brits was addressing the management of Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA), the sub-sector regulator at the project in Tororo.

Since Monday, ERA has been on a tour of different electricity-generation projects across the country. The tour, slated to last five days, is intended to check on the progress made by the projects and to ascertain that the licensees are adhering to the terms and conditions of their licences.

Commissioning the Tororo plant will bring the total solar



Officials inspecting solar panels. Uganda is exploring other sources of renewable energy, such as solar energy

generation capacity to 20MW.

Eng. Ziria Tibalwa Waako, ERA's chief executive officer, described the project as one of government's initiatives to implement the renewable energy policy, under which it seeks to diversify electricity generation.

She explained that Uganda's generation mix is hydro-dominated, but the country has been struggling as the

water levels drop during dry seasons, making it hard to extract maximum installed capacity with hydro plants.

"Therefore, this plant brings on board a generation mix that enables us to go through all these, regardless of the season of the year," Waako said.

She added it is advantageous that its power is generated where it is

consumed as this minimises technical losses and stabilises the grid.

"It is implemented near the Uganda Transmission Company Limited (UETCL) load centres and this contributes to reduction in technical losses that may be incurred during transmission over long distances," she explained.

The plant is located less

than a kilometre away from the substation in the district.

However, she declined to delve into details of the project cost and how it is financed, explaining that "the plant being still work-in-progress, we shall have those details during commissioning."

She added that the consumer will pay \$11 (sh396) per unit generated.